

Minuteman protest draws little support

By Leigh Dethman

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The Utah Minuteman Project may be losing some steam.



Raye Nielsen, left, of Salt Lake protests with Minutemen and supporters at the state Capitol against employers they say hire illegals.

Michael Brandy, Deseret Morning News

Nearly four months since their highly publicized border stand against illegal immigrants, the group garnered a group of about 20 supporters at the state Capitol Thursday to protest employers they say hire illegal workers.

Protest organizers blamed heat for the small number of protesters — temperatures peaked at 97 degrees Thursday afternoon. Midway through the event, only a smattering of protesters stood outside the Capitol, while some were packing up their things to get out of the sun.

"It's a hot day," said protester Alan Kirkwood, who later added the group had problems getting the word out about the protest.

The group protested outside the Capitol, where a massive renovation project is under way. Minuteman organizer Alex Segura said the state is allowing undocumented or illegal immigrants to work on that and other state construction projects.

Segura said he has no proof that illegal immigrants are working at the Capitol but knows "they are in there." He said Utah Minuteman Project officials are in the process of filing a Government Records Access and Management Act request to back up their claims.

"Contractors are pumping up their bottom line by using illegal aliens and not American citizens," Segura said.

Doug Welling, executive vice president for Jacobsen Construction, said he is confident that should U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials raid the Capitol construction project, they would find nothing wrong.

State officials said they have full confidence in Jacobsen's hiring practices.

"We do a very good job of screening our employees," Jacobsen said. "From time to time we'll do an audit to see if someone slipped by. We terminate people if they can't provide the documents."

Tony Yapias, a local Hispanic rights activist, agreed with the Minutemen that Utah has an illegal immigration problem. Yapias just doesn't agree with the

way the Minutemen are dealing with the problem.

Instead of protesting, Yapias said, the group should work together with local leaders to find a solution.

"Our Latino community is sick and tired of the Minutemen and their racist attitude toward our community," said Yapias. "We need solutions, rather than demonstrations and picketing."

Yapias has organized a massive Latino Service Day scheduled for Saturday to counter anti-immigrant characterizations that the Latino community is a burden to the state and its resources.

Minuteman Wally McCormick said he is not a racist. He said he believes the borders need to be closed during a time of terrorism.

"We're not racist. We're not warmongers. We're here to let President George W. Bush know we are opposed to his policy of keeping the borders open," McCormick said.